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SOME MORAL ASPECTS OF THE "WOMAN MOVEMENT"

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If ever sanity is needed it is in the discussion of "feminism." Civilization faces no more serious issue than the new status of women. From the economic, domestic, and political points of view, the social readjustment that must result from the long delayed equality of the sexes attracts attention and arouses speculation. The BIBLICAL WORLD is, however, concerned with that profound aspect of life which is involved in every social change. And it is this we have asked Professor Rauschenbusch to discuss.

I was walking through a factory district when the whistle blew in the evening. In a moment the sidewalk was flooded with a tide of human beings, wave on wave, and they were nearly all girls.

I passed along the corridors of a great university when the bell rang. The students were hurrying through the hall and filling the lecture rooms. Their ranks were alive with the bright colors of women's dress, the saucy flash of hats and ribbons, the loose tendrils of hair, the passing glances and smiles of sex challenge.

I sat in the convention of a great political party. There were women all around me and women on the platform; not ladies who had come to see their men-folks perform, but women who were there to do the performing, earnest, watchful, ready to assert themselves and to fight for a cause on the same level as men.

Women have arrived—in industry, in education, in politics. They pervade all domains of life, not passively as adjuncts, but with a sense of equal rights and a feeling of new-found destiny.

This is a tremendous fact. In our age of social transformations what other social process is of equal import? It would be a great thing if we could abolish child-labor. It would be an immense achievement if all public utilities could be brought under public ownership. But what is that compared with a forward movement in which half of the entire nation is surging up out of the semi-seclusion of the past, out of a world with a fair but narrow horizon, out of self-imposed limitations of purpose, and marching out into a future which none knows or understands? This thing through which we are passing is a social revolution.

If this social change stopped after readjusting the equilibrium of the sexes, it would constitute an epoch in the history of humanity. Every little brother and sister playing together; every man and maiden mating; every father and mother governing a household in common; every man and woman meeting in society would henceforth act differently on account of this great change. But this change is only the beginning of more

changes. The emancipation of half the race must release a vast reservoir of stored energy. What will it do and not do?

They are realizing these unknown potencies concretely in Illinois just now. What changes will votes for women make in the political alignment of the state? Who will get hurt? How will the game of politics have to be played from now on? What new tremolo stops will have to be pulled on the organ of political eloquence to get those votes? Who knows?

This political adjustment is sudden and conscious. But similar adjustments of even greater importance have long ago begun to take place quietly and for the most part unconsciously.

For instance, it would be hard to formulate the influence of the feminine invasion on the methods, the spirit, and the subject-matter of higher education. But every professor who has had to pass from the old to the new must have felt that the presence of women affected him. Some liked it; some did not. A public speaker would be strangely unresponsive to the electric currents of humanity if he talked in precisely the same strain and temper to an audience composed of men only and to another in which women predominate. But in most educational audiences women do predominate.

The ascendancy of woman has long begun its work in religion. In our American Protestant churches women, who have been mute and passive in the church for ages, have found a voice and have freely uttered their religious ideas and sentiments, molding the vital and working religion of the country. They

have accented morality according to their ethical tastes and interests. The anti-saloon movement is one of the results; there are others. What changes in our theology have been due to the transition of women from a passive to an active participation in church life? Anyone who would answer that question adequately would make a real contribution to church history. Women have not occupied our pulpits, but the men in the pulpits were conscious of talking to women who would speak their mind and who did their own thinking. The profoundest changes in theology come by silences. Things are left unsaid because they sound awkward or arouse contradiction; after a while these things have quietly dropped out of the religious consciousness of an entire generation.

We are far too deeply immersed in these currents of change to see clearly whither they will carry us. God knows. Plainly women are here as our equals in religion, in the intellectual life, in industry, and in the life of our commonwealths. When a thing is both right and inevitable we might as well accept it and go ahead.

The results will not be all to the good. No great historic movement worked out 99.6 per cent pure—not even Christianity. The rise of woman will cut some knots and tie others. But no admixture of evil must make us waver in the faith that it is right to do right, and that a larger freedom will in the end work out the larger good.

Only let us be prepared for the concomitant evils and call them by their name when they come. A rising social class always feels that its cause is wholly good and noble, and only its wisest

leaders foresee the possible evils wrapped up in its triumph. When the business class was unhorsing the feudal nobility, it was aglow with moral enthusiasm for the beauty of freedom of trade and the right of private initiative. Yet that same class has now run us into the slough of capitalism in which all civilization is floundering. The industrial working class, which is now trying to unhorse the business class, is confident that the rise of labor means the ascendancy of pure social justice. I have had socialists tell me there can be no more graft after the instruments of production have become the property of the workers. In the same way the woman's movement thrills with splendid self-confidence and optimism.

That self-confidence is the necessary fighting temper of an onward movement, but half-truths and illusions are always dangerous. One often feels as if the old attitude of the sexes was merely being reversed. The time was when men felt that woman was the weaker vessel, inferior in intellect, *semper mutabile*, a perpetual snare to the higher nature of the male. Now the judgment has swung around; many men feel that women are morally better than men. Perhaps it is right that men should instinctively feel so. But it is a different matter when women think so too. They are not better. They are only good in different ways than men. They have just as much sin and nonsense in them as men. They are the same raw human nature, and in some directions they have had less hammering and molding than men. We shall know that women collectively have arrived at their spiritual maturity when they have

just as much instinctive and outspoken reverence for the moral qualities of men as all decent men now have for the moral qualities of women.

Most men could mention off-hand some of the sins to which men are especially prone. How many of us can mention off-hand the corresponding sins of women? Are there none, or have we done no thinking about them? Women are pointing out the evils into which masculine mismanagement has brought our social life. It is highly desirable that they should point them out. More precision to their forefinger and more scope for their voice! But are there no corresponding evils into which the predominant influence of women has already brought us? Have they done well with the power they now have?

There is one great line of employment in which women have always been both the employers and the employees—domestic service. But this relation is notoriously one of the most unsettled and unsatisfactory of all social relations, more feudal and less democratized than any other. In all other employments the worker hunts his job; domestic service is so unattractive that the worker sits in an office and allows herself to be hunted. We must allow for the fact that the relation is more intimate and psychologically complicated than most other working relations, but is the undeveloped morality of women not a factor in the psychological difficulties?

All fighting movements are prone to resort to violence. Force always seems a short cut to the end desired. But the short cut usually turns out to be the longest way around. We can measure the sobriety and sustained moral power

of a movement partly by its self-restraint and its refusal to seize the hiltless dagger of force. All the world knows how one wing of the suffrage movement has succumbed to the temptation. Yet the resort to physical force was the last thing we should have expected of a woman's movement. Women rarely commit brutal murders; they prefer poison or get their men to use the violence. Of course the militants in England are only a small minority. For all other women the moral test was in the speed with which they would see the danger to their movement and react against the militants.

The evolution of religion for centuries has been toward the religious freedom of the individual and toward the exercise of scientific scrutiny in matters of fact and doctrine. Any religion that does not train men in the use of freedom, and in wise use of doubt, is either a hold-over from the past or a relapse to the past. Now, there are two forms of religion which have sprung up among us since the advent of the feminine movement, Christian Science and Theosophy. Women have been the predominant and creative spiritual factors in both. But both rest to a singular degree on authority and both make very heavy demands on the capacity of believing without scrutiny. Christian Science is a "religion of authority" even more than Roman Catholicism. It does not even permit its authorized exponents to preach their own sermons on its doctrines. Is there any connection between these characteristics of these two religions and their feminine habitus?

Women handle more money and handle it more freely than formerly.

Many have wealth of their own. Housewives manage the home finances more autonomously than formerly. Women do the bulk of retail buying for consumption and thereby give the decisive direction to the economic organization of society. Is it accidental, then, that simultaneously with the advent of woman there has been, through all social strata, an increase in the opulence of living, in the expensiveness of dress and furniture, in the adornments of the table, and in the lavishness of entertainment? These are the things which women control. Of course there are other important factors involved, but it seems as if the increasing financial power of women had promptly registered itself in these ways, and chiefly in everything which sets off the personality of women. What enormous amounts of time, and labor, and money are spent in accentuating the charms of women, young and old, with a framework of clinging stuffs, of jewels, of elaborate hair, of furniture, of lights, of houses. Imagine all the women on the avenue on one sidewalk and all the men on the other. On which side would civilization, and on which side would barbarism be, so far as dress is concerned? Men may be more open to the lusts of the flesh, but perhaps women make up for it by the lust of the eye and the pride of life. Throughout history the women of the upper classes have dropped into a parasitic and idle life faster than their men. "Society," so called, is the product of women as much as politics has been the product of men; for its evils they are largely responsible.

The standards of modesty have declined since women have moved out into

freedom. Older women agree that girls talk less modestly, dress less modestly, and act less modestly than formerly. It is not simply an increase in sincerity and freedom of self-expression. It is a loss of control. Family authority, religion, and the customs of their sex used to hold wayward impulses in restraint. These restraints imposed from without have weakened, and many have no self-restraint to offset the loss. So they follow desire, "go the limit," lean over the barriers that are still left, and prod temptation to come and tempt them. The dress of many women has become a scandal. Instead of draping and veiling what is suggestive of sex, they accentuate it. If men did the same it would be disgusting. I have found repeatedly in large meetings of men that there is a suppressed sense of resentment and shame for the dress of women. We have come to a serious pass when men are more modest in their feeling than women. These fashions have now run for several years, but what adequate expression of condemnation has come from the intelligent and organized womanhood of the country?

Even the dullest of minds must realize that the facts disclosed by the recent vice reports are ominous. The class of prostitutes is not a thing apart. These women are part of the whole body of womanhood. Some girls are betrayed and decoyed, and pass suddenly from decency to vice, but the great majority graduate into it slowly. First they cut across the boundary occasionally, then often, and finally they make a business

of it. If such large numbers are going over, a slow landslide of morality must be going on. Here the fashions in dress, the spread of smoking and drinking among society women, the forwardness of half-grown girls, the conscious exposure at summer resorts, and the success of sex novels have symptomatic value. Something new seems to be going on around us, and it is closely connected with the emancipation of women. They are earning their own living, going and coming and keeping their own hours like men, and apparently they are gravitating toward similar sexual standards.

I believe in the woman's movement and have always supported it. I trust in its ultimate workings. My point is that all who wish it well must be prepared for the inevitable concomitant evils in it and resist them. In her old relations of wifehood and motherhood woman has all the inherited instincts and traditions of centuries to make her wise. In the new relations into which she is now entering, hers is the younger sex. The feminine virtues in the past were not all due to superior personal character, but largely to the inhibitions imposed by the social institution of the home and the clear standards of conduct prescribed in a comparatively stationary social life. The movement into freedom means a severe test of women, singly and collectively, a test like that which comes to us all at adolescence—a wider field of action, increased liberty, larger duties, untried paths, unknown passions and temptations.